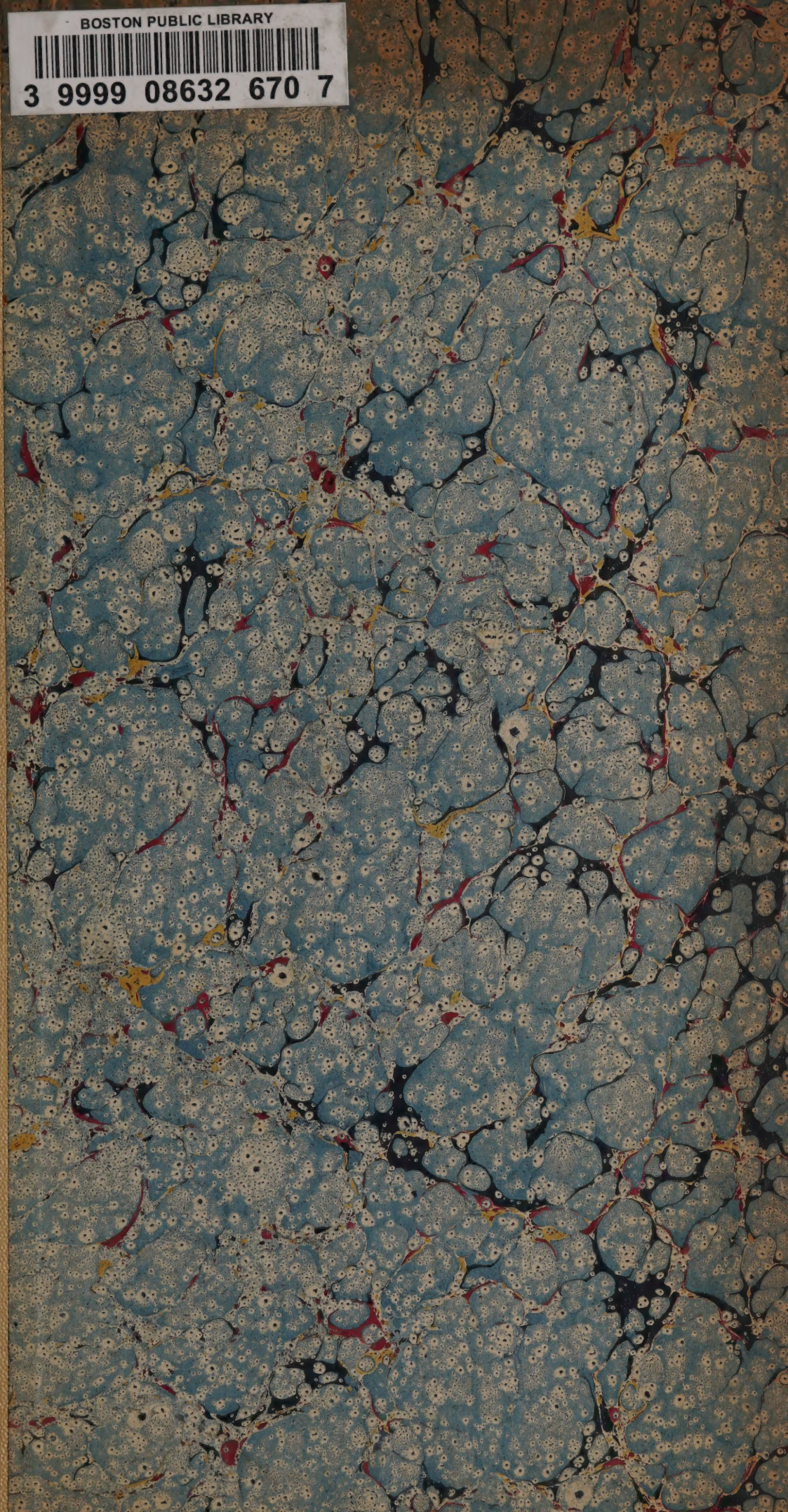


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13
The Claims of Congregational Churches.

A

CENTENNIAL ADDRESS:

BEING

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A PLEA IN VINDICATION OF THE RIGHTS

OF THE

FIRST CHURCH OF CHRIST IN PEPPERELL, MASS.

DELIVERED FEB. 9, 1847.

By CHARLES BABIDGE,

MINISTER OF THE FIRST PARISH.

BOSTON:

WM. CROSBY AND H. P. NICHOLS,

111 WASHINGTON STREET.

1847.

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1847.

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Mar. 22, 1878

UNIVERSITY OF CAMBRIDGE

CAMBRIDGE:

METCALF AND COMPANY,
PRINTERS TO THE UNIVERSITY.

TO REV. CHARLES BABBIDGE, Minister of the First Church and Parish in
Pepperell, Mass.

Dear Sir : — The undersigned, a Committee of said Parish, respectfully request that you will favor them with a copy of the address delivered by you on the 9th instant, at a celebration of the centennial anniversary of the founding of said church, for publication.

J. BULLARD,	GEORGE W. TARBELL,
JOHN WALTON,	G. ROBINSON,
LUTHER TARBELL, JR.,	IVERS R. HARVEY,
EBENEZER RICHARDSON,	HENRY C. WINN,
C. W. BELLOWES,	A. H. WOOD,
THOMAS STEVENS,	LEMUEL W. BLAKE.

Pepperell, Feb. 9th, 1847.

Pepperell, May 24th, 1847.

TO MESSRS. BULLARD and others, Committee of the First Parish.

Brethren : — Your letter, requesting a copy of my address for publication, has been in my hands several weeks. I have refrained from acceding to your request, because I felt unwilling to protract unnecessarily any agitation among us. For obvious reasons I now submit the address to your disposal, with the sincere hope and prayer that the rising generation among us will never permit a human and ever-changing creed to stand between them and God's Holy Word, since to do so is virtually a rejection of both God and his Son.

Respectfully, yours,

CHARLES BABBIDGE.

N O T E .

THIS Address is printed, first, because such was the request of the Parish, and, secondly, because so many things have been erroneously imputed to the author as having been uttered by him, that he is somewhat desirous that those who did not *hear* may read and judge for themselves. The Address is printed precisely as it was written. It was written under the sense of an unprovoked indignity, and may seem ill-natured and severe. That cannot be helped now. It makes no literary pretensions, having been prepared in the short interval between the two centennials, and in connection with other labors besides those usually required of that "servant of all work," a country minister.

A D D R E S S .

To commemorate the deeds and the experiences of our ancestors is, at the same time, a duty and a pleasure. That duty becomes more imperative, and that pleasure is greatly enhanced, when religion and patriotism combine to prompt and to gladden a public celebration. It is equally in the name of religion and of patriotism that we have, this day, met to commemorate the founding of the First Church of Christ in Pepperell.

Under ordinary circumstances, this would have been a most interesting occasion. It would have afforded a noble opportunity to review the prominent events in the history of the town, and also to revive the recollections of the men of former times, to read again the story of their eventful lives, and to search out the secret springs from which they drew that wonderful strength of character which has made them the boast of this, and will make them the wonder of coming generations. It would have been an easy and a comparatively pleasant task, in this way to have *illustrated*, while we celebrated, New England Congregationalism.

But, alas! from this religious and patriotic observance, this act of filial reverence, we are almost wholly cut off. Strange as it may seem, though the First Church of Christ in Pepperell does not complete the hundredth year of its

existence till this very day, there has nevertheless been already a centennial celebration of this event, some eleven days ago. A somewhat numerous, and, I presume, very respectable body, styling itself "The Church of Christ in Pepperell," did, at the time above specified, proceed, first, by means of evidence which they esteemed satisfactory, to establish their own right to be called *The Church of Christ in Pepperell*,* and, upon the strength of that assumption, did, secondly, in the afternoon of the same day, proceed to celebrate the occasion by a public discourse and other formalities.

Against this assumption, and this whole procedure, so far as it is a *public act*, I now enter my public and solemn protest. I shall sustain this protest by such facts as I deem pertinent to the case, and by an appeal to the good sense and the sense of propriety which I hope still remain in the hearts of my fellow-citizens. In a word, I shall appeal to what remains among us of the spirit of New England Congregationalism, in behalf of Congregationalism itself.

But, first, a word must be said concerning the apparent anomaly of two separate centennial celebrations of the same event. The First Church in Pepperell was gathered on the 29th of January, 1747; but still it had not reached the completion of its hundredth year till the 9th day of February, 1847. And lest we should seem to have used a Unitarian calendar in our reckoning, as we are sometimes suspected of using a Unitarian Bible, I will explain the matter.

In consequence of the solar year, that is, the period of the earth's revolution around the sun, not coinciding with either 365 or 366 days (the solar year requiring 365 days and a fraction of another day), some confusion existed in the ancient methods of computing time. Julius Cæsar made the first attempt at reforming the calendar, and his method of reckoning is called Old Style. But as this method

* See Note B.

made the year a little too long, Pope Gregory XIII. directed ten days to be struck out of the year 1582, calling the next day after the 4th of October the 15th. He intended, that, by omitting three *intercalary* days in four hundred years, the civil and solar year should keep together. This form of the year is called New Style. This alteration was ultimately adopted throughout the continent of Europe, with the exception of what is now the Russian empire. The Autocrat of Russia still adheres to the Old Style (or did till very recently), perhaps in consequence of the opposition which has existed for centuries between the Latin and Greek Churches. The English adopted the New Style in the year 1752. The error in computing time amounted then to eleven days. These were taken from the month of September, 1752 (five years after the founding of the First Church in this town), by calling the 3d of that month the 14th. To illustrate the case by a familiar example; — a note of hand given on the 29th of January, 1747, and payable after one hundred years, would not have become due till February 9th, 1847; it would not have run a hundred years till then. To take another example; — a person born on the 29th of January, 1747, would not be a hundred years old till this very day (February 9th, 1847). Of course, then, the First Church in Pepperell was not one hundred years old till this very day.

I have heard it stated, but I think it must be incorrectly, that, on the celebration above alluded to, it was said, that it is the practice not to regard the difference of Old Style and New, but to take the dates as they stand. If this were the practice (which it is not), it would surely be very absurd to call a thing a hundred years old, and to celebrate its age as such, when it still wanted eleven days of that age. Practice cannot make that *right* which is *wrong*; and it is a somewhat dangerous doctrine, to maintain from the pulpit that it can.

This day, then, is the true centennial birthday of the First Church of Christ in Pepperell. And now the next

business is, to inquire who have the best right to celebrate it. The fact that it has already been celebrated by another church would seem to imply that *we* have not. But to those of us who had not the pleasure of attending that celebration, this fact might seem a mere *innuendo*, were it not that the whole case is laid open to view by this little pamphlet, which will form an important document in our present investigation. This pamphlet is a very recent production. On its title-page is this inscription in capital letters: — “Articles of Faith and Covenant of The Church of Christ in Pepperell.”

Having, thirteen years ago, been in due form ordained by a regular ecclesiastical council, minister of the First Church and Religious Society in Pepperell, you may well suppose this pamphlet struck me with some surprise. I looked into its pages with a good deal of curiosity. I found that it contained a statement of twelve separate articles of faith, some of them so exceedingly indefinite, that I ceased in a measure to wonder at the single definite article **THE**, which appeared so very conspicuously on its title-page. I will not deny that my emotions were very peculiar. To all appearance, I had both *lost* and *found* a church, — had lost my own, and found somebody’s else. I had for several years felt, I hope in some proper measure, my responsibility as pastor of the First Church of Christ in Pepperell. But here was a printed document declaring that there was no such church in existence. I had for years supposed that there were two regularly constituted and very respectable churches in this town; but here it was staring me in the face, in capitals, that there was only one. I knew that there were sometimes mysteries in the *creeds* of churches; but here was one touching their very *existence*. I finally concluded that it was best to deal with that as with every other mystery, both in and out of churches, — to let it alone until it explained itself. This it has now done. The other church in this town (and in common courtesy I suppose I must for the present allow it its assumed title), **THE Church of**

Christ in Pepperell, by assuming to itself the prerogative of the First Church, and celebrating (somewhat prematurely) its centennial birthday, has given us to understand that the pamphlet is theirs, and they assume its responsibility. We, therefore, who supposed ourselves to be the First Church, are under the dire necessity of struggling, not for our *name*, nor for our *rights*, but for our very existence. The sentence, not of excommunication, nor of banishment, but of utter extinction, has gone forth. How happy should we feel, and how thankful should we be, that it is only our ecclesiastical, and not our mortal, body that is *pressed* to death, — that the screws and the lever are worked by an honest and good-hearted printer, and not by the soulless familiars of the Spanish Inquisition! But we shall have the “benefit of clergy,” ere we are put “*in extremis*”; and as we are on trial before a Christian tribunal, we demand to be heard why sentence of utter extinction should not be passed upon us. Let it therefore be distinctly understood, that *we* do not assume to be THE Church of Christ in Pepperell, — O, no! that would be folly and presumption. The world would laugh at it; and Heaven forbid that we should excite mirth, since to do so would be as conclusive proof of something wrong about us as if we incurred the world’s displeasure. We assume only to be the *First* Church of Christ in Pepperell, without assuming to know whether there are one or a dozen churches besides us. Nor do we assume this without serious and careful investigation of the matter at issue.

With a view to establish our claims, we will now settle these two points: first, the general question, What is a Christian church? and, secondly, the particular question, Who constitute the First Church in this town? To settle the first of these questions, we shall ask no aid of human authorities. We are aware that the Roman Catholic hierarchy maintain that theirs alone is the Christian Church, and that salvation is impossible beyond its pale. The Protestant Episcopalian insists, in behalf of his church, upon the divine

right of bishops, the transmission of the apostolic office, and the divine appointment of the three orders of the clergy, — bishops, priests, and deacons. The multitudinous sects and denominations of Christendom contend each for its own creed, as an essential element of Christian discipleship, — the Orthodox Congregationalists of New England contending for a creed that is essentially Calvinistic.

Now the impropriety of going to any of these numerous and mutually hostile authorities is perfectly obvious. Any one of these authorities is just as good as the other. They may all be regarded, mathematically, as equal antagonistic forces ; they neutralize each other, and no force or authority remains. “To whom, then, shall we go ?” We will answer, as we have asked, in the words of Simon Peter, — “Thou, Lord, hast the words of eternal life” ; and, we may add, of eternal truth. To JESUS, then, the great Head of the Church, the only infallible Teacher in things spiritual, we submit our question and our cause ; and we ask, What is a Christian church, *recognized as such by him* ?

In the sixteenth chapter of the Gospel of St. Mark, at the fifteenth and sixteenth verses, we read thus : — “Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature : he that believeth, and is baptized, shall be saved ; but he that believeth not shall be damned.” Here we have, in a few words, the charge which Jesus gave to his disciples, when he sent them into the world to preach the gospel of salvation. What, now, it is in point to ask, did Jesus make the essential prerequisites to salvation ? Faith and baptism, — faith in the self-commending truths of his religion, and a confession of that faith before the world, by the ceremony of baptism. Whoever complied with these requirements was declared by the Saviour himself to be entitled to, or rather, to be in the possession of, salvation. Now, as *salvation* includes every thing that man can ask for, either in this world or in eternity, of course whatever is declared by Christ to be sufficient for salvation includes every thing essential, and, among other things, it includes both the meaning and the

reality of the Church, the Church of the Lord Jesus Christ. It is no earthly authority, then, that has any right to say who *is*, or who *is not*, of the *Church*. The Roman Catholic may say who is of *his* church, and who is not; and the Protestant Episcopalian may do the same; and so may the Orthodox Congregationalist. They may do this; and no man, who is capable of marking differences and making distinctions, need say any thing against it. People may be as impertinent and silly as they please. There is no statute law against that. But when they undertake to say, and that authoritatively, who is and who is not of the *Church of Jesus Christ*, then it is time to give heed. It is no longer a very appalling thing to be expelled from a Catholic, or an Episcopalian, or an Orthodox church. But to be denied the right of membership in the *Church of Christ*, and that too after all *his* requisitions have been complied with, is what every freeman in Christ will protest against. Faith, a sincere belief in the great doctrines and facts of the gospel, and an avowal of that faith before the world, is all that Jesus demanded of his followers throughout all coming time. And in view of the restrictions, the hedges and ditches, the pass-words and pass-keys, the shibboleths and sibboleths that modern religionists have got up around the Church, just think of the absurdity, the miserable absurdity, of inviting the Rev. Mr. A. of one town, and the Rev. Mr. B. of the next, to come with their respective lay-delegates, and see and say whether this church or that is a *Christian* church! Just as if certain clerical gentlemen, some of them very diminutive in size and not *very* great in intellect, and some of them vastly more gigantic in stature than in understanding, had Divine authority to say who *do* and who *do not* belong to the Church of Christ. No one who is a true disciple of Christ attaches a feather-weight of importance to such men's authority; and whosoever consents to be *controlled* by it stands convicted before the world of this tremendous sin, namely, of having made Christ, who is the sole Head of the Church, subordinate to mere men, — and sometimes very inferior men too.

To be really of the Church of Christ, then, is something more than to have one's name enrolled upon a catalogue; it is something more than to be of "good standing" with this, that, or any other denomination. *Faith* is the spiritual qualification, and *baptism* the outward sign of initiation; and whoever possesses these may claim to be of the Christian Church, let men say what they please. But "believe" *what?* you will ask. And I acknowledge this question is seasonable and important; because one sect will say, "Yes, you must believe in our creed"; and another, "You must believe in ours." I will therefore answer the question, but not in my own name, nor in that of my sect, if I have one; but in the words of an accredited and beloved disciple of Jesus, none other than St. John. "Whosoever," he says, "believeth that Jesus is the Christ is born of God." That declaration settles the question. Whosoever believeth that Jesus is "the Christ," that is, God's anointed or commissioned messenger, will, like a true disciple, be governed by his precepts, and be sustained by his promises. They who do this compose the Church of Christ, though they should be thrown by circumstances into churches of a hundred different names; and whosoever cannot exhibit these proofs or credentials, but rely solely upon their connection with this or that body of professing Christians, are not by any means *necessarily* of the Church of Christ. They may be members of churches, and those churches may be self-styled Christian churches. But in its high, its true, its holy sense, the Church of Christ is a church of *souls*, and not a church of bodies merely; it is a communion of humble, devout, intelligent *minds*, and not a mere society of individuals leagued together for the maintenance of a creed. Viewing the matter in this light (and no one, I think, can deny that it is the true one), how very idle it is, how calculated to awaken the sentiment of pity in generous minds, if not the stronger feeling of contempt, for any number of individuals to style themselves, and print themselves, and thus proclaim themselves, "THE Church of Christ," in a town of more than sixteen hundred inhabitants!

This question being settled, let us now proceed to the *particular* question, Who constitute the First Church in the town of Pepperell? I have sometimes heard a remark like this, made in reference to *legal* matters, that "possession is nine points in the law." I cannot explain the meaning of this phrase, nor do I know that it has a meaning. But I suppose it implies, that, when a person has been left in the undisturbed possession of an interest for a term of time, there is presumptive evidence that that property or interest is equitably his. Now there was never, to my knowledge, any public question or doubt of the right of the church connected with this parish to be called "The Church of Christ in Pepperell," until the organization of another church, and after that to be called, in common courtesy, "The First Church of Christ in Pepperell." Nor do I now believe that any such question did arise, until the publication of the above-mentioned pamphlet.* And it will not answer for the authors of that publication to say that its title-page leaves that question untouched. One of two things is undeniable: *they either meant to make that church whose creed it purports to be, identical with the original church in Pepperell, or else they meant to imply, and that very distinctly, that the church connected with the First Parish is no church at all.* If they admit the first part of this alternative, I tell them distinctly they are mistaken, and I shall demonstrate their error. If they mean what the last supposition implies, I shall not answer them at all, lest I should be betrayed into a want of courtesy, perhaps of civility, as great as their own. Such a wholesale process of excommunication would provoke a contemptuous smile as the only suitable reply.

From the character of the evidence presented on the centennial celebration (of which this is only a *duplicate*), I am satisfied that the first of the above suppositions was the one adopted and defended at that time. It was maintained, as I am informed, that the other church in this town, and I

* See Note B.

shall henceforth call it the *second* church, ought to be regarded as the *original*, because it held the same opinions and maintained the same doctrines that the founders of this church, in 1747, held and maintained. A more unfortunate, because a more easily disproved, position could not have been assumed. Facts, plain as the sunshine, and stubborn as the everlasting rocks, refute and annihilate every such assumption. To these facts I now invite your attention.

The fifteen individuals who were first gathered into a church in this town, in 1747, so far as they had any speculative religious notions, were probably Calvinists; that was the belief of their times. But if they were (and that is by no means a settled point), they were of the wiser and better sort of Calvinists; for their "Covenant," by which they pledged themselves to each other, does not contain even one single Calvinistic doctrine. Whoever composed that instrument deserves to be held in high esteem; for a better constructed covenant, saving perhaps something of its length, was never drawn up.* It begins thus: —

"We, whose names are underwritten, do covenant with the Lord and with one another, and do solemnly bind ourselves before the Lord and his people, that we will, by the strength of Christ, walk after the Lord, in all his ways as he hath revealed them to us in his Holy Word.

"ART. I. We avouch the *Lord Jehovah to be* our God; and give up ourselves, with our children after us, in their several generations, to be his people, and that in the sincerity and truth of our hearts.

"ART. II. We give up ourselves to the Lord Jesus Christ, to be ruled and guided by him in the matters of his worship, and in our whole conversation acknowledging him not only our alone Saviour, but also our King to rule in and over us, as well as our Prophet to teach us by his word; accordingly, we wholly disclaim our own righteousness in point of justification, cleaving to him for righteousness, grace, life, and glory."

* I have since found that it is a copy, almost *verbatim*, of the Covenant of the First Church in Salem.

And there is all that can be found of theological doctrine. It then goes on with mutual promises "to walk by the help of Christ in the spirit of love with their brethren and sisters, to avoid all jealousies, backbitings, &c., to forgive and forbear," and so on. So far as the expression of doctrinal views is concerned, it is, essentially, Unitarian; and I should long ago have proposed to this church to go back to the covenant of the fathers, and adopt it, were it not that to make so many and such strong mutual pledges would seem too much like affectation. Still, there is not a doctrine expressed in that covenant which is not in harmony with what is called "Liberal Christianity" at the present day.

Let us now look at the creed of the Second Church in this town, as we have it published by themselves. Is it Calvinistic? Not exactly; because there is wanting in it one of the most prominent, and certainly one of the most dangerous, of the "five points," — the doctrine of the "perseverance of the saints." If the fathers of this church were Calvinists, as the churches of their period generally were, certainly this essential omission on the part of the Second Church vitiates completely their claim to be the successors of the original church. The omission is a fatal one. The members of the Second Church have renounced the faith of the fathers, as palpably as has any body else; and will they still affect to rest their claim on the identity of their creed, — in other words, on the direct procession of their faith from the fathers? It were folly to do so.

Then, again, no person acquainted with theological subjects can read these "Articles of Faith" of the Second Church, without seeing, in almost every line, the effort to cloak the repulsive features of old-fashioned New England Calvinism. Such is the care with which the sublime inconsistencies of that system are softened, that, really, if the fifteen pioneers of the Church in Pepperell *were* Calvinists, and could come among us to-day, they would never subscribe that pamphlet as a statement of their faith.

Let us now take it the other way. Suppose that they were

just what their covenant solemnly signed would seem to imply that they were, — strong-minded, pious men, who felt the solemn worth of religion, who loved and honored Christ as their Teacher and Saviour, who cared nothing about the systems of theological doctors, but went for the great practical facts of Christianity, and them alone. Surely, you would not saddle such men with such a complex and (excuse me) contradictory creed as these “Articles of Faith.” If you attempted to impose such a burden, the attempt would be in vain. The voice which still speaks in their “Covenant” is the voice of a rational and liberal Christianity, and will not say “Amen” to what is abhorrent to itself. Take it either way you please, then, call them Calvinists, or call them “rational and liberal Christians,” the published creed of the other church in this town will not suit the fathers. The fathers of 1747 were quite unlike the sons of 1847. Consequently the present First Church has nothing to fear on this score. We do not deny that we have departed from the Calvinism of a hundred years ago, and so has every church in the Commonwealth. Our claim, therefore, is as good as any body’s else claim ; and we have possession into the bargain.

But this assumption by others of an identity of faith, that is, of believing as the fathers did, will not hold good, even in regard to this church under the ministry of its second pastor, the Rev. John Bullard. For the evidence on this point, I again have recourse to this pamphlet (“Articles of Faith,” &c.). Here we have the creed of this church as it was in the day of the Rev. Mr. Bullard. That creed is *decidedly* Trinitarian, and as *decidedly* anti-Calvinistic. It contains an explicit, straight-out avowal of the doctrine of the Trinity, which these “Articles” do not contain ; and while these “Articles” do avow the strange, the paralyzing doctrine of Predestination, Mr. Bullard’s contains nothing of the kind. And yet, in the face and eyes of this pamphlet (“Articles of Faith,” &c.), which itself proclaims the striking dissimilarity, the opposition in fact, of these creeds, the other church

in this town come forward and assert that their present creed has *always* been the creed of the church; and all this after they themselves *have printed these discordant creeds, and, under their own hands and seals, acknowledged that they are discordant.* If this is not a theological hobble, an ecclesiastical blunder, for people to get into, then I do not know what is.

Here is another fact worth looking at. If there has been no change of opinion, no alteration of the creed, since the Rev. Mr. Bullard's ordination, how happens it that the creed which was adopted then has been compelled to give place to these "Articles"? It is more explicit, and, in my opinion, far more Scriptural, than they. Its language is clear, concise, and full. It contains but *six* articles, while the present one contains *twelve*! — And yet no alteration. O, no! Besides, it is Trinitarian, while the printed creed of the other church is not *necessarily* so, inasmuch as its third article implies Sabellianism far more plainly than it does Trinitarianism. And yet, in spite of all these glaring departures from the old creed, it is maintained that there has been no change, — that the same faith is held now, that was held by the original fifteen members. "Credat Judæus Apella, non ego."

In this connection I will notice certain other evidence that was offered at the recent centennial, to prove the orthodoxy of the Rev. Mr. Bullard. Two certificates, either oral or written, were furnished by two superannuated clergymen, who testified to this point. Both these clergymen, while they were actively engaged in the ministry, embraced the exclusive system, and shut out of their pulpits their brethren, men as wise, as good as themselves, and probably very much more efficient. It can be proved by living witnesses, that when, on a certain occasion, the Rev. Mr. Bullard was speaking of the disgraceful fact, that the Rev. Mr. Beede of Wilton had been excluded from the pulpit in Mason, solely because his views were not sufficiently exclusive, tears of mingled grief and indignation were coursing down his cheeks. The bold and enthusiastic soul of the second pastor

of this church could not brook the spiritual usurpation that was beginning to show itself in the New England churches; *and to the day of his death he held it in utter detestation.*

Let us look at the *results* of this early display of bigotry and spiritual tyranny. How stands the old Congregational Church in Mason? I presume its ancient minister sees little in its condition to cheer his declining days. How is it with Wilton? Its old Congregational Church, liberal always in its views, stands firm as its mountains, faithful in its allegiance to God and to Christ, and watchful over the best interests of man. From that church have gone forth the Abbots, the Barretts, the Greeles, the Livermores, the Peabodies, and others, — men whose names are written, as it were, upon the firmament, — men of whom their native town may be proud, inasmuch as our whole Commonwealth is proud, and has reason to be proud, of them.

But to the other certificate. This was furnished by a neighbouring clergyman, between whom and the Rev. Mr. Bullard, it is a notorious fact, a strong opposition of theological sentiment prevailed during their whole lives; and yet this gentleman came forward and testified to the Rev. Mr. Bullard's orthodoxy. He must, from all accounts, have been indebted to something besides his *memory* for his facts. — So much for those certificates.

Another position which was taken in defence of the claim of the other church in this town to be considered *The* church, and the only one here, was the condition in which the church in this parish was left by the secession of a large majority of its members, in 1832. We will now look into this matter. At the centennial which was celebrated eleven days ago, it would seem that there was some uncertainty as to the number of those who did not choose to secede. I will therefore enlighten the public on that point. There remained of those who had been members of the church in the Rev. Mr. Bullard's day five individuals. To these I may add one more, in reference to whom a vote of excommunication had been passed, — which vote he never regarded;

and as I intend to make further use of this vote, I shall say nothing more about it at present. There were two other individuals, members of the church in the Rev. Mr. Bullard's day, with whom circumstances brought me acquainted. I was with them in their last sickness, conversed freely with them upon religious subjects, and officiated at their funerals; and I hesitate not to say, that, if no special efforts had been made to prejudice their minds, they would never have deserted the altar where they had worshipped for half a century. While, then, it is true, that, under the peculiar and excessive excitement which attended the separation in this parish, a majority of the church were induced to quit their associates, it also remains a fact that *some remained*, true to their vows. And now comes up the question, Who were the church, after this explosion of the original church into two fragments? "O, the majority must rule!" some one will say. Yes, so I think. In all public matters, in which, in order to the very existence of society, a "Yes" or a "No" must be immediately forthcoming, the majority must rule. There *must* be *action*; and surely it is not for the *minority* to say what that action shall be. But what particular action calling for a vote is required of a Christian church? Is it to decide what Christianity is? No; Christ has done that. Is it to exercise dominion over the faith of each other? Certain ecclesiastical bodies, I believe, do this, notwithstanding St. Paul, in writing to the Corinthians, disavows on his own behalf and that of his brother-apostles the right to do any such thing. A majority of the church-members in this parish in 1832 voted to leave the parish, and go somewhere else. Well, they had a right to do so. But had they a right *to compel those to go who did not wish to*? I think not. It would have been a very miserable kind of "glorious liberty," to be compelled to bow down at another's bidding. Those who went had a right to *go*, and those who did not go had a right to *stay*. The question, then, arises, — Who broke their covenant vows, those who went, or those who staid? They had mutually promised

and pledged themselves "to walk together in the exercise of all Christian charities towards each other." Who broke this covenant, this solemn vow? Not they, surely, who remained quiet in their places; they did nothing to forfeit their Christian name and rights. This being so, they were, in proportion to their numbers, as good a church as were they that seceded. Put the most unfavorable construction upon their case, and they were at least the fractional part of the church, and those who had left were nothing more. The claim is just as good one way as the other; and it is only an act of usurpation for the largest fraction to call itself *The Church of Christ in Pepperell*, when others, with an equally good claim, deny that right.

A portion of the church, then, remained quietly faithful to their covenant vows, worshipping where they had worshipped for years, and maintaining, without any interruption, the Christian ordinances. Suppose, now, that this remnant had been disposed to exercise somewhat of that secular power of which they have seen and experienced so much, how would they have proceeded? They would have called a church meeting, summoned the refractory absentees to appear, and then voted, that, if they did not return to their covenant obligations by a certain day, they should every man, woman, and child be cut off. This very thing had been done by the whole church, only a little while before, and, as the case is relevant to the question now at issue, I will rehearse it. Mr. ****, for causes which he deemed satisfactory (and I have no doubt, that, to a man of his nervous and excitable temperament, they *were* satisfactory), absented himself for a long time from the ordinance of the Lord's Supper. He was "dealt with" and expostulated with to no purpose. The idea was fixed immovably in his mind, that his brethren looked upon him with no kindly feelings. He therefore met every proposal to return to the ordinance with a decided refusal. He was led into this wrong persuasion by his morbid sensitiveness, which, as you know, was eventually the cause of his death. The vote of

the church was allowed to take effect. When I became the minister of this society, I found him in communion with this church. I spoke to him, in a friendly manner, of the propriety of some action in reference to the record of his case ; but he was morbidly sensitive on the subject, and I dropped it. The whole matter belongs now to a higher tribunal, and there let it be decided. But I appeal to this case only to show how the church, in its palmy days, treated a matter of this kind. Acting upon this precedent, how should the little remnant that was left have proceeded, when so many absented themselves from the ordinances ? They should have quietly passed a vote, that, if the absentees did not return to their duty by a certain day, they should every soul be excommunicated, — deacons and all. Who would have had an ecclesiastical existence then ? Who would have been the successors of the original church ? I take it, not the *excommunicated* portion. If a majority of votes is decisive of questions of discipline at one time, it is so at another. If a majority, in one case, could cut off an absentee member (against whom nothing was alleged but his absenteeism), it would in *all* cases, though the number of the absentees might be legion. Agreeably to a precedent which they had themselves established, only a year or two before the separation, the seceders would have been simply a company of excommunicated church-members, — at liberty, of course, to call themselves what they pleased, provided they did not take a name already appropriated.

But now we have reached another point in this argument or investigation. Some of you may wish to know upon what ground, or for what reasons, the church voted to forsake the ancient altar, and go forth to erect another somewhere else. What injustice did they experience ? What wrongs were inflicted upon them ? Was their religious liberty invaded ? Did an ungodly generation interfere with the solemn observances of religion ? Did the members of the First Parish, — and in those days that meant the inhabitants of the town at large, — did they act as oppressors ?

Did they violate the law of equal rights? Did they claim any thing which did not belong to them as a Christian congregation? If they did, then the church did right in protesting against popular usurpation; and for one, I would honor them for so doing. These inquiries make it necessary to go back some years in the history of this religious society. On some accounts I regret this *necessity*, on other accounts I rejoice in this *opportunity*.

In the year 1837, I took occasion, at a meeting of the church of the First Parish in this town, to suggest the propriety of appointing a committee for the purpose of examining the records of the church, with a view to correcting any *ex parte* and erroneous statements, and explaining any facts that might need elucidation. Such a committee was appointed; and as their report is precisely what is wanted in this place, I shall read it from the Church Records.

“At a special meeting of the First Church of Christ in Pepperell, held at the house of Deacon John Walton, the following report was presented by the committee chosen and instructed to examine the Records of the Church, with a view to correct any misstatements, and likewise to furnish a fair history of the recent important changes in the religious affairs of this town.

“We regard the duty which has been assigned us as one of no ordinary importance. We are aware that the records of an ancient church are eagerly perused by the antiquary and the religious historian. Recourse is often had to such records to establish general historical points, and to find illustrations of the moral and religious character of different eras and generations. The religious origin and character of such records secure to them great respect and confidence. It is, therefore, the sacred duty of every church to see that no erroneous statements or impressions are conveyed to posterity through this medium. So long as man is fallible, all records are liable to be imperfect; and gross injustice may be done, even when no wrong was intended. For these reasons, the members of the First Church in Pepperell deem it their duty to examine strictly their records, so far as they relate to the recent eventful changes in the society. Convulsions of no ordinary character have rent the church to its very foundations. The feelings which have been ex-

cited on all sides have been unfavorable to a clear perception of truth, and a just allowance of the claims and rights of individuals. The records of the church during the recent commotions are of course *ex parte* statements. They give the views and present the doings of only *a part* of the society. The present members of this church are disposed to think that justice has not been done, in all cases, to all parties. They cannot, therefore, in justice to themselves, to their children, and to the cause of rational Christianity, permit statements, of whose inaccuracy they are convinced, and whose tendency must be to perpetuate a most unjust reproach upon themselves, to go down to posterity uncorrected. They cannot consent to set their hands and seals to their own shame, by permitting these records to remain unexplained.

“The records of this church subsequent to January 25, 1832, indicate a state of dissension between different portions of the First Parish in Pepperell. There are frequent intimations, that the just rights of the pastor and the church were disregarded, in a manner the most unjustifiable. We will proceed to particularize sundry passages. On the 127th page there is an entry in these words: — ‘An ecclesiastical council was convened at Pepperell, this day, February 1, 1832. The Rev. James Howe presented the doings of the First Parish, and of the church; and the clerk of the Evangelical Congregational Society of Pepperell the doings of said society, by which the following facts were shown.’ Some of these ‘facts,’ so called, are as follows. Under the head of Article 3d, it is stated, — ‘That peace and harmony prevailed among the people of this society, to a good degree, till May, 1831, when a vote was obtained in town-meeting, that the Liberal party should occupy the meeting-house for several Sabbaths.’ Article 4th, — ‘That since that time there has been a continued and undeviating determination on the part of the First Parish to destroy the peace of the church, and to have such preaching as we deem subversive of the great truths of the gospel of Christ.’ Herein is intimated, first, that the commencement of disturbances in the parish was of so recent a date as May, 1831. Secondly, that, subsequently to that time, there was a continued determination to destroy the peace of the church; and, thirdly, that the church were under the necessity of withdrawing from the meeting-house, and worshipping elsewhere. It is further recorded, that, in view of these ‘facts,’ the council passed a vote approving the course pursued by the pastor, and ratifying the same, ‘and admiring

with gratitude the goodness of God in leading the church to take the measures they did.' In an address delivered to the seceding portion of the church, by Rev. John Todd, of Groton, on the above-mentioned occasion, the above statements are recognized as true, and that portion of the church are addressed as having suffered the greatest wrongs and outrages. In this address, while one part of the society is called a 'shelterless flock and an altarless church,' the other is stigmatized as 'opposers of Evangelical religion,' are deliberately charged with being guilty of persecution, of driving their fellow-Christians 'from the fountain at which they were baptized, from the altar at which they sacrificed, and from the house of prayer where their feet first entered on holy ground.'

"While it is a painful, it is also the solemn duty of the present members of this church to enter their firm protest against these statements. It is, indeed, a serious proceeding, when the disciples of Christ, to do themselves justice, must sift the actions and the words of their brethren; and, while they vindicate their own religious character and reputation, must fix a reproach for ever upon that of others. Nevertheless, we, the members of the First Church in this town, in view of our responsibility to the great Head of the Church, do solemnly protest against the statements contained in these records. In justification of our protest, we invite the attention of posterity to a dispassionate detail of facts,—to a history of the troubles in the First Parish in Pepperell.

"For the *origin* of these troubles, we must look to a period considerably *earlier* than the time assigned on the face of these records. The troubles in this, as in almost all the New England territorial parishes, date from the commencement of that system of priestly exclusion which began near the commencement of the present century. The operation of this system was to exclude from the pulpits of those Congregationalists who adopted the exclusive policy those clergymen who did not choose to forego their rights as men and Christians who were unwilling to give up the great principle of the Reformation, and who were not to be driven to bow themselves in submission to the creed of a party. In consequence of the exclusive spirit prevailing in different religious societies, many clergymen far advanced in age, preëminent in learning and piety, and exemplary in all things, were excluded from pulpits to which they had hitherto been freely admitted, and where their ministrations had always been welcomed, as tending to edification and the salvation of

souls. It is not surprising, that, in consequence of this, excitements prevailed extensively, and that religious revolutions became frequent. Heart-burnings and jealousies sprang up among both ministers and people. As the system of exclusiveness became more openly avowed, it was pressed the more strongly and unblushingly. The clergy began to *compel* those to come into it, whose sense of Christian duty forbade such proceedings. Threats of excommunication and oppression were thrown out, and a spirit manifested which might be expected in a Roman Pontiff or a Spanish Inquisition, but which was hardly to be expected in New England.

“In common with other societies in this Commonwealth, the people of Pepperell felt a natural fear that this spirit of exclusion might find its way among themselves, to the disturbance of religious peace, the wounding of the church, the sundering of families, and the introduction of all those public and domestic evils which have attended acts of spiritual despotism.

“During the ministry of the Rev. John Bullard, although it was well understood that differences of opinion upon theological points existed among the Congregational clergy, no clerical brother was excluded from the interchange of pulpit services. At the decease of the Rev. Mr. Bullard, which occurred at a time when the spirit of exclusiveness began to manifest itself fully and strongly, the society felt a reasonable fear, that, unless caution was used, the evils which were already felt in other churches might be introduced into their own. Accordingly, when a candidate was sought for ordination, this was made a prominent consideration. The choice of the society at length fell upon Rev. James Howe. In view of his attainments as a scholar, of his qualifications as a Christian, and of his general reputation for liberal and charitable feeling, he was invited to take the charge of this society, as its pastor. An ordaining council was called, consisting of pastors and delegates from Congregational churches, nine of which were avowedly Unitarian, and eleven Trinitarian.

“The events which took place at the ordination indicate plainly the feelings, wishes, and fears of the society. Much discussion was had in the parish, as to the future proceedings of the candidate in regard to ministerial exchanges. Distrust was excited, which eventually became so strong, that, on the morning of the ordination, a remonstrance (signed by seventy-nine voters) against the ordination was presented to the ordaining council. On consulting with the

remonstrants, it was found that the sole objection to further proceedings by the council was the fear that the Rev. Mr. Howe might adopt a policy in regard to exchanges which would not meet the wishes and expectations of the parish. To satisfy the people on this point, explicit questions were proposed to the candidate. The answer given by him will be best learned from statements given under their own hands, by several members of the ordaining council. The Rev. Dr. Ripley, of Concord, moderator of the council, being requested to state by letter what took place in the council on this particular subject, writes as follows: — ‘I have the impression that the remonstrants were fearful that Mr. Howe would become too Orthodox, or Calvinistic, for them, and would refuse exchanges with Liberal clergymen. Mr. Howe was interrogated on the subject of exchanges, and he satisfied the council, that he intended to exchange pulpits with Liberal and Orthodox ministers, and that exclusiveness was not agreeable to his mind or his views of propriety. To convey his ideas more clearly, he said, he should be ready to exchange with any of the clergymen of the council.’ The Rev. David Damon, scribe of the council, writes as follows: — ‘Mr. Howe was questioned in council to this effect, perhaps in these very words: — Are you willing to hold ministerial intercourse, and exchange pulpits, with all ordained Congregational ministers in regular standing, without respect to the differences of sentiment which exist among them? To this Mr. Howe replied, that he was entirely willing to exchange with every minister belonging to the council; and upon a subsequent repetition of the question, repeated the same, with additional remarks, which I understood to mean that he should be willing to exchange with *other* ministers also, of sentiments similar to those held by the gentlemen of the council.’ The Rev. Dr. Thayer, of Lancaster, writes as follows: — ‘At the ordination of Mr. Howe, and knowing that he had received his theological education under direction of those who patronized the “exclusive” course, which had then commenced, I proposed to him a question of this import, — May the Liberal ministers in this neighbourhood, as they are called, rely on your holding intercourse with them in the way of exchanges? He gave an affirmative answer, which was so entirely satisfactory to me, that I voted for the ordination.’ The Rev. Mr. Bascom, of Ashby, writes thus: — ‘After the usual examination preparatory to ordination, Dr. Thayer and Mr. Damon said there was yet one point on which they wished to question the candidate, and hoped to receive

a clear and explicit reply, — that was as to his future intended course of ministerial exchanges. Much conversation was had on the subject, in which many of the *soi-disant* Orthodox endeavoured to prevent a direct reply, and insisted that Mr. Howe ought not to be required to pledge himself as to any particular course he might hereafter think proper to adopt. Dr. Thayer and Mr. Damon were, however, decided in their views that it was proper for them to know, before placing him in the pulpit, whether he, having obtained the place through their aid, would afterwards keep them and such as they out of it. Mr. Howe appeared candid and ingenuous. I may not recollect his words, but I know the impression they left on my mind, when his final answer was given, — “ You see the complexion of this council ; I shall exchange with them, and with gentlemen of like views, without any discrimination on account of particular theological tenets.” Dr. Thayer remarked that he was satisfied, and I believe all the Liberal part of the council were so.’ The letters from which these extracts are taken remain on file with the clerk of the parish, and give a full account of the proceedings of the council, and of the matters which transpired at their sitting.

“ The answer thus given, the promise thus explicitly made by the candidate, allayed the fears of the remonstrants, and their opposition was withdrawn. The letters from which extracts have now been presented establish these several facts : — first, that Mr. Howe was ordained over a parish that was decidedly liberal in its feelings and expectations, and opposed to that unchristian policy which was creeping into the churches ; secondly, that he promised to consult these feelings and expectations, and that in regard to them he made distinct promises which were deemed satisfactory ; and, thirdly, that solely in consequence of these promises, all opposition was withdrawn.

“ Exchanges were made agreeably to promise, and for some years harmony prevailed. So long as the promises thus given were redeemed, no trouble was made. But, at length, when it was determined by a portion of the Congregational clergy of this Commonwealth, self-styled Orthodox, to compel every minister either to discontinue exchanges with Unitarians, or be expelled from the fellowship of his brethren, and abide the consequences, it was found that Unitarian ministers would no longer be admitted to the pulpit in Pepperell. It was *then* that troubles began. Those of the society who had, on the strength of Mr. Howe’s promises, discontinued all

opposition, found, too late, that these promises were not to be redeemed, and that their own just expectations were to be disappointed. They accordingly felt themselves called upon to regain, if possible, those rights of which they found themselves deprived. Communications passed between the pastor and the people, in which the request was directly made, that he would, agreeably to promise, continue his exchanges with Liberal clergymen. This request was distinctly declined. The only alternative which remained to the Liberal portion of the society was, either to forego the expression of their feelings and the enjoyment of their just rights, or else to avail themselves of the legal means of regaining those rights. Accordingly, an appeal was made to the society at large, and, after sundry trials, a vote was passed in town-meeting, granting to the Liberal party the use of the meeting-house for a certain number of Sabbaths in the year, — the pulpit to be supplied at the expense of that portion of the society, without in any way affecting the salary of Mr. Howe.

“ This is the entire amount and extent of the ‘persecution,’ ‘driving their fellow-Christians from the sanctuary,’ &c., so frequently and strongly set forth in these records. Had the above vote been allowed to go into peaceful operation, the subsequent unhappy occurrences would have been avoided. The inhabitants of Pepperell might have still constituted an undivided religious community, — have worshipped where their fathers worshipped, — have gone to the house of God in company, and there communed together. Directly upon the passage of this vote, the portion of the society styling themselves Orthodox separated themselves from the parish, and were organized as a distinct society.

“ Upon the facts now exhibited, the present members of this church, in behalf of themselves and of their fellow-citizens of the First Parish, would ground the following declarations: — First, that in any struggle which may have arisen between different portions of the First Parish in Pepperell, the Liberal party have contended for no privilege other than what is secured to them by civil and ecclesiastical law. Secondly, that they asked for nothing beyond what was implied as their just due, in the calling of a council in which Unitarian or Liberal sentiments were recognized as distinctly as Trinitarian or Orthodox. Thirdly, that to secure to themselves the enjoyment of their rights and privileges, so far as the candidate for ordination was concerned, an explicit promise was required and re-

ceived, that on this score there should be no cause of complaint. And, finally, that the facts in the case show that this promise was not fulfilled.

“ We now ask confidently, — and we might ask in the tones of injured and indignant men, — Where has been the persecution? Who have prevented ‘ the faith once delivered to the saints ’ from being heard in the ancient place of worship in this town? Have *they* been guilty of these enormities, who have simply asked to be allowed their just, their unquestioned rights ?

“ A century hence, the reader of these records, could he know fully what feelings have been indulged and what scenes have been witnessed among his ancestors, would deem it unaccountable that such excitements could have been produced by such seemingly inadequate causes. These records, however, contain a partial solution of the mystery. Let him read the address recorded on the 129th page, as delivered by Rev. J. Todd, before the seceding members of this church, on their re-organization as a separate body. Coming as it did from one whose sacred office required him to *soothe*, rather than excite, the bitterness of the human heart, it ought to have borne a different stamp. Unless its secret purpose was to *irritate* and *inflame*, it was a very misjudged production. Its inflammatory tendency is visible in every line. It has every appearance of having been *designed* to magnify imaginary wrongs, in the eyes of a people already prepared to regard themselves as the subjects of gross oppression. When the speaker, in that address, deliberately hands over the supposed opposers of the church to the vengeance of God, he must have forgotten his own need of mercy. Indeed, the address seems to us to have been providentially inserted in these records. It furnishes an explanation of the singularly bitter feelings which have prevailed in this and other religious societies. It is a melancholy record of the unblushing effrontery of the clergy, and, at the same time, a token of the credulity of the people of this generation. We look upon that address as a memorial of the bigotry of an erring age. When it is intimated that the wrath of God will overtake ‘ the enemies of the church,’ we are contented to remember, that ‘ vengeance belongeth to the Lord,’ and that ‘ the Judge of all the earth will do right.’ We are to be judged, not by an earthly record, but by one in heaven. Still, we are disposed to entertain a reasonable regard for the judgment of posterity. We have, therefore, furnished this statement of facts in our own vindication. That portion of the

parish who are denominated the Liberal party have only acted upon the broad principle of New England Congregationalism, namely, that each religious society is independent of any foreign control in matters of faith and government. They avowed, and were in fact the only party who did avow, the great principle of the Reformation, namely, that the Bible is the only sufficient rule of faith and practice. They were actuated by a lawful purpose. If, in effecting that purpose, unchristian feelings have been excited and painful scenes witnessed, the sin and guilt must lie at *their* doors who made resistance *necessary*, and compelled their fellow-men to assume the attitude of a resolute self-defence.

“ In behalf of the committee.

“ CHARLES BABIDGE, *Chairman*.

“ *Pepperell, March 22, 1837.*”

So much in answer to the question, whether the seceding members of this church were *driven out*, or went out of their free will and pleasure.

I believe that I have now met, in all its points, the argument which was submitted eleven days ago, in opposition to the right of the church connected with this parish to be styled the First Church of Christ in Pepperell. We have gone to the great Head of the Church, as the only competent authority to settle the question of its meaning and character. Upon the authority of Scripture, and the usage of Apostolic times, we maintain that a church, *spiritually viewed*, has no existence otherwise than as it is the “body of Christ”; regarded *visibly*, it is made up of that portion of a Christian society who covenant or agree to walk together in certain specified particulars; in its *corporate* capacity, it is an association availing itself of the conveniences which are afforded by the public provision for the worship of God. When any portion of such an association, whether by vote or otherwise, rescind their covenant or mutual agreement, then they cease to be members of that association or church, and are at liberty to go where they please, — they, of course, holding themselves accountable to God for their act. But they have no right to take with them the common property of the concern, nor the common name of those who

remain faithful to their covenant. Those who withdrew from this house voted to do so ; — they had a right to do so. By their own act, they dissolved their connections with the First Church.

I have also met, in all its points, the argument based upon the *supposed* fact, that the theological creed of the church in this town had remained unchanged, and was still retained in all its purity by the present Second Church in this town. Under their own hands we have it, that the covenant of the original church was decidedly liberal in its spirit, and free from the disputed points of theology ; that the creed of the Rev. Mr. Bullard was distinctly Trinitarian and decidedly anti-Calvinistic ; and that the present “ Articles of Faith ” of the Second Church are not *necessarily* Trinitarian, though, in the main, openly Calvinistic. If, with all these acknowledged variations and discrepancies, that church still asserts that it retains the original creed unaltered, then verily it may go on to assert any thing, for nobody will think of contradicting it.

The church worshipping in connection with the First Parish claims to be the *First Church*. But upon what grounds ? *Not* upon the ground of an identity of faith with the original founders. O, no ! We believe, that, in the lapse of centuries, the prophetic saying of the great and good John Robinson, the minister of that goodly company who settled at Plymouth, has been fulfilled. He believed and predicted that truth was to beam anew from the pages of God’s holy word. We believe that it has ; and that the systems of mere men have yielded to “ the truth as it is in Jesus,” — that the lamps of Augustine and Chrysostom, of Calvin and Luther, have paled and almost gone out, beside that brighter light which is destined ultimately to enlighten the world. We found our claim upon a sincere and earnest wish and effort to catch the beams of this luminary, and to concentrate them upon the revelation of God in Scripture and in Nature. We found our claim upon the unshackled and progressive spirit and character of our religion. *We* care not

for Calvinism, nor for Arminianism, "*sub*," *super*, nor *subter*; we go for "*the truth as it is in Jesus*," — and that in the liberal spirit which characterized the founders of this church, — the irrepressible spirit which showed itself in those worthies who marched from beneath the walls of this meeting-house, to offer themselves a willing sacrifice of blood on the high altar of civil freedom at Charlestown, — that spirit of independence, that love of popular liberty, which is ever active in the hearts of our townsmen, *save when occasionally their sectarian ardor gets the better of their candor and sense of justice.*

And now, having met the *argument*, I must be indulged a moment, while I bestow due attention upon the *poetry* contained in the recent "centennial" sermon. Allusion was made, as I understand, to the changes which have taken place in many of the old territorial parishes in Massachusetts, — changes from Calvinism to a more liberal and Scriptural faith. It was intimated that the light had gone out in them, — that they stood like dead trees, — that the wind, as it whistled through their dry and leafless branches, discoursed "Æolian music," — but "no leaves, no fruit, were there." This is undoubtedly good poetry, for it has been admired a great many years. But, like most poetry, it is, in the main, *fiction*, — it is not quite true. Nevertheless, it awakens the recollection of "things mournful to the soul." As the traveller passes through the town adjoining us on the west, and sees that venerable meeting-house, so simply, and yet, in some respects, so quaintly fashioned, with its broad, wide-reaching roof, its curiously and elaborately constructed tower, he is forcibly and sadly reminded of other days. There stands a monument of old Congregationalism. There it stands, solitary and deserted, on the mount of sacrifice, where the hands of a departed generation placed it, and where their prayers consecrated it to the worship of Almighty God. Thither, year after year, went up the inhabitants of that town, parents and children, brothers and sisters, neighbours, friends, and fellow-Christians; and there they bowed in

humble prayer together, — one people, one minister, in the presence of the one only living and true God. Within that shrine, and around that altar, — now bearing other marks than those of “Time’s effacing fingers,” — fathers and mothers gathered, to sprinkle upon the infant’s brow the emblem of spiritual purity, to “sign it with the sign of the cross.” There, too, the bereaved went up on God’s holy day, to find comfort in their affliction, and strength in their sorrow, while all their fellow-worshippers united in a fervent prayer in their behalf. From the steeple of that house went out, year after year, the Sabbath call to Christian worship; and they who neglected the voice of the living preacher, or whom circumstances debarred the privilege of social worship, could hear the voice of this religious monitor sweeping along their fields, and entering at every dwelling, and even telling the inhabitants of other towns that their brethren were wending their ways to the house of God. How is it now? For years that church has stood a mouldering wreck; no call to prayer issues from its tower; no voice is heard within its walls, save that of the wind moaning over the desolation of the place. There, indeed, is Æolian music; but it never swells into the tones of the loud, triumphant chorus. No; the courts of the Most High are deserted and desolate. And how happens it? — *how happens it?* You have in that house, and in every thing that appertains to it, an illustration of the consequences of sectarian strife. The citizens of that town were told, in common with the citizens of other towns, that they must adopt a narrow, sectarian, exclusive policy, — a creed, not of Christ, but of Calvin, — not of rational and liberal Christianity, but of Orthodoxy. And you see the result. There stands the “dead tree” with its “dry branches”; and Orthodoxy is welcome to all that has followed, — in a special manner, to all the biographical glory of one of its ministers.

And I have in my mind’s eye one other “dead tree.” I have had occasion, once or twice in my life, to pass through a town in this county, situated many miles off, and there I

saw another of the old churches of Massachusetts. For many years the preaching in that house was of the most severe form of Calvinism ; and, had I time, I could relate a fact in illustration of the moral effects of such preaching, — a fact in relation to an individual who was executed, many years ago, for a capital offence. There stands the church, in all the imposing grandeur of its primitive architecture. But it is deserted ; and it has been so for years. The people outgrew Calvinism, and were too poor, in a divided state, to bear the expenses of public worship. Their house stands empty and useless. It is a “dead tree.” Yes, dead. And there, close beside it, is the place where the vermin burrowed that gnawed out the life of the brave old oak. There stands a little church, — a church much smaller than many a village school-house, — and close beside stands, or stood, a grog-shop of three times its dimensions. And who wonders ? Divide the hearts of a people, set them unnecessarily at variance on any subject, no matter what, and vice will thrive among them triumphantly. You destroy, utterly annihilate, the public sense of right, and justice, and security ; and amid mutually conflicting moral influences, the wrongdoer can work successfully and safely.

From the manner in which these “dead trees” were noticed, one would suppose that they constituted a forest. But it is not so. The old parishes in Massachusetts, having nothing to rely upon under God but simple truth, and scorning to engender an artificial excitement in the community, have had heavy burdens to bear, and have borne them patiently and well. Their life is strong within them. Theirs is a righteous cause, and God will help them sustain it. But let us look a little more closely into the condition of some of these old societies, — these “dead trees.” We shall perhaps discover some facts which will serve to show the relative condition and progress of Calvinism and Liberal Christianity. In the year 1845, there were in the city of Boston eighty-one religious societies. Of these twenty-nine were Unitarian ; Orthodox Congregationalist, thirteen. Pre-

viously to the year 1700, there were in the city of Boston eleven Congregational societies; of these, every one is now Unitarian, with the single exception of the "Old South." And are these "*dead* trees"? Indeed, they are not. They are vigorous and strong in their old age. Their branches bear up their leafy honors into the bright sunshine. There is "music" among those branches. And what is it? I will tell you. It is the mingled songs of widows and orphans, who have been saved from destitution and misery by the charities of Liberal Christians. It is the "unwritten music" of the blind mingling sweetly with the heart-music of the deaf and dumb. It is the softened voices of rough sailors and hoarse men-of-war's men, who, instead of cursing each other, and blaspheming God's holy name, are singing "psalms, and hymns, and spiritual songs." It is the melody of souls that have been redeemed from sin and spiritual death by the benevolent efforts and zeal of Liberal Christians. It is a harmony of sounds sweeter far than that of "Æolian music." It is the out-gushing of gladness from hearts that shall hereafter unite in a general song of thanksgiving before the throne of God.

And who are they who have been instrumental in effecting these happy changes, these glorious conversions? *Liberal Christians*. Who have ever been most forward in works of zeal and practical benevolence? Who have been eyes to the blind, and ears to the deaf? Who have been ever ready to shelter the orphan, and protect the widow? With whom originated the Ministry to the Poor, the Benevolent Fraternity of the Churches, the Samaritan societies, and other blessed ministries? With *Liberal Christians*. Who are they who are ever "foremost among the foremost found," in the cause of the Bible, of emancipation, of temperance, of education, and of religion "pure and undefiled"? *Liberal Christians*. And for this reason, it should be a matter of rejoicing that their religious views are advancing in the world with such an unprecedented rapidity. "In the year 1826, Dr. Chalmers boasted for Scotland, that all the church

accommodations possessed by Unitarians in that country, put together, would only afford seats for fifteen hundred people, and that one half of them were unoccupied. This boast was *then* true. *Now* a single congregation alone — the Glasgow Unitarian congregation — numbers a body of people connected with it greater than Dr. Chalmers assigned, sixteen years ago, to the whole kingdom. Eleven other societies have been formed, and there is a clear prospect of a greater increase. In 1820, there was not a single Unitarian congregation in Ireland; now there are thirty-nine, and the number continues to increase every year. And why this wonderful increase in the kingdom of Great Britain, within so short a time? The answer is in part contained in the fact, that it is only twenty-four years since Parliament removed the legal penalties with which the profession of Unitarian opinions was punished. There are now in England three hundred Unitarian congregations. On the continent of Europe Liberal Christianity is advancing with the same rapidity. In Switzerland, it is triumphant in the church and city of Geneva, the chosen abode of John Calvin; and it is gaining ground in the other cantons. So it is throughout the continent.”

In 1825, the whole number of Congregational Unitarian societies in the United States was one hundred and twenty. It is now three hundred. Besides these, there are in the United States two thousand Unitarian societies distinguished by the denominational names of Christians, Universalists, and Friends, making in all about two thousand three hundred.*

Do you ask to what is to be attributed this unprecedented spread of liberal religious views? It is precisely what might and *must* be expected from the character and tendencies of the age. It is an inquiring age; it is a bold and determined one; and any and every system, be it moral, religious, or political, must submit to the ordeal of sober truth and reason.

* Orthodox Congregationalists, 1,420. — *American Almanac for 1846.*

Men are daily losing their reverence for human authority ; and in nothing more rapidly than in religion. It is in vain that you tell them that a doctrine which is "contrary to reason" is "above reason." They are ready to reply, that they doubt the soundness and the accuracy of that reason which lays down such a principle. They will not consent to be tied to a system, whether religious or civil, which they have outgrown. If you attempt to resist this movement of the popular mind by artifice, or by an obstinate adherence to a system that is venerable for its age alone, you become the teacher of skepticism and infidelity. You virtually acknowledge that Christianity cannot stand upon its own basis, but must be kept from falling by human hands.

It is the want of the age, the demands of the human intellect and heart, that Liberal Christianity meets ; and because it does so, it is met by hungering souls with a glad welcome, and is cheered onwards with a hearty God-speed.

It is on account of this tendency of the public mind, of this spirit of the age, that every thing is to be deprecated which can make Christian churches hostile to each other. The churches are already looked upon with sufficient suspicion ; and they commit a species of suicide, when they belie their Christian profession. Any affectation of superiority, any unbecoming pretensions, on the part of any church, can only awaken contempt in well-balanced minds ; while to those to whom the whole subject of religion is of no special moment, it suggests only matter of jesting and merriment.

During a ministry of nearly fourteen years, I am confident that the terms Unitarian and Orthodox never crossed my lips as many times. Knowing that my path was plain before me, I have endeavoured to illustrate and enforce "the truth as it is in Jesus," with such power as my intellect and heart permitted under the circumstances of my ministry. I have called no man master ; and I have never regarded any man as my personal or sectarian enemy. I have restrained, I hope, with a good degree of success, an inborn propensity to

sarcasm and merriment. I have never assailed in levity or ill-humor the weak points in the faith of others. I have willingly conceded all that others could ask for, provided it involved no compromise of my own faith or personal manhood. And I have only at this time protested — strongly, I know, and fairly, I know — against the movement of the other church in this town, because I thought serious considerations required it. Personally, I care nothing for the assumptions of others. Personally, it is of as little consequence to me that Orthodoxy is antagonist to Liberal Christianity, as that Papacy itself is. I have made a public protest, because I thought it due to the church connected with this ancient religious society, to the officers and members of this church, and to the society at large.

I have protested against the recent movement, because the slightest interference with the reputation or the rights of a church only serves to perpetuate that spirit of opposition and rancor which disgraces the Christian church and threatens to work its ruin. It is time that churches ceased their quarrels, and tried to introduce a little vital piety into their creeds and professions. Until they do this, we may depend upon it that people will look for mutual sympathy and aid to *other* "associations," "fellowships," and "fraternities," than what *should be* a brotherhood of Christians. Until they do this, we may depend upon it, that, when such a man as William Lloyd Garrison stands up in the presence of assembled and excited thousands, and says, with his own peculiar eloquence and power, that the Christian church in these United States is the bulwark of every vice in the land, and of almost every abuse in the world, more and more will believe *he speaks the truth*.

I should have preferred that those records which I have to-day been compelled to drag into light should have remained hidden and forgotten. I would have treated them as the French nation has treated the bones of that multitude who were butchered in that era of blood, the French Revolution, — I would have walled them up for ever from the

public eye. Let the unwelcome spectacle teach us all a salutary lesson. We of this town are an excitable people. The inhabitants of Pepperell have always been so. There is something in the atmosphere upon our hills that infuses a mercurial, a sensitive, principle into our blood. We are great sticklers for equal rights and popular liberty. The very name of "Bunker's Hill" stirs our hearts as the sound of the trumpet does the war-horse. Being aware of this common characteristic of ours, let us beware how we give each other occasion for offence. We must remember that every encroachment upon each other's rights will be resisted to the last of our strength and our life. Let us live together *peaceably*, in that spirit which becometh the followers of the Son of God.

APPENDIX.

NOTE A.

MUCH has been said, in the public journals, in regard to the day of the respective centennials in this town. It would betray a want of courtesy to show up in this place the many blunders which have been committed. The following, from a source which may be relied on, is all we wish to say in reference to the matter. "The evidence is positive, that the church in Pepperell was organized on the twenty-ninth day of January, 1746-7, Old Style. A common century, in New Style, contains 36,524 days. Eleven days having been left out of September, 1752, makes the century complete on the 9th day of February, 1847, according to New Style. If the *punctum temporis* for a centennial celebration be sought, computing by tropical years, multiply 365 days, 5 hours, 48 minutes, and 48 seconds by 100, the product is 36,524 days, 5 hours, and 20 minutes. Add this to January 29th, 1746-7, at 10 o'clock, A. M., and the amount is February 9th, 1847, 3 hours, 20 minutes, P. M. The consistent time, then, for the first centennial celebration of the founding of the church in Pepperell, is February 9th, 1847; but if any choose or prefer a different day, *de gustibus non disputandum est*.

NOTE B.

In an Appendix to a "Centennial Discourse" delivered in this town, January 29th, 1847, the assumption of this exclusive title is excused by the author on the ground that he took it as he found it "on the church records." Yes, but *what* church records? The records of the *First Church*, which were loaned to his predecessor, that he might make a copy of them; and from that *copy* the name was assumed.

In the same connection, the author of the "Centennial Discourse" concedes to the First Church a "legal" existence. That is all that would be demanded at his hand; but if it has an *existence*, it must have a *name*. It would call itself *a* church of Christ; certainly it would not, being a Protestant church, assume, like the Roman Catholic Church, to be THE Church of Christ. That would be Protestant Papacy, indeed.

The author of the "Centennial Discourse" indulges in some severe strictures upon Chief Justice Parker and the Supreme Court of Massachusetts, in reference to the celebrated "Dedham Case." The ground of complaint seems to be, that the court did not see fit to make the *State* subservient to the *Church*. A hard case, truly. We would feel very indignant, if we could. "A lawyer, reviewing this case in 1829, says" — what doubtless he is ashamed of in 1847. We are very suspicious that when this "lawyer" talks about the churches as "speckled birds," he is only making *game* of them.

NOTE C.

NOTE H, in the Appendix to the "Centennial Discourse," is in reference to "charging Mr. Howe with breaking a solemn promise made before his ordaining council, that he would exchange with clergymen of 'liberal sentiments.'" The Note goes on to say, — "As this charge has recently been reiterated in public, the publishing committee have requested the insertion of the following testimony, to refute [!] the above calumny." Calumny! Does the writer of the Note mean to say, that to recite the charge is to perpetrate a calumny? But let us see what the evidence is that is to refute the charge. The Note goes on, — "The Rev. Messrs. Fisher and Farnsworth, of Harvard and Boxborough, who were both on that council, say, that when something was said in the council on the subject of exchanges, — a minority of the people opposing his settlement because he was not liberal enough, — Mr. H. signified his willingness to exchange with the clergy of the ordaining council." Well, that is all that was ever asked for. So it seems, even upon the testimony of Messrs. Fisher and Farnsworth, that the promise *was given*. But stop; we have not the whole, — "*so far as he knew them*." Very well; he knew that they were Trinitarian and Unitarian ministers, of each a nearly equal number, — that they were every one of them men of the first rank and respectability; *he knew* why they had been summoned as a council; he knew what was implied and expected in his promise. The Note goes on, — "but, being a stranger in this vicinity, he declined committing himself." Now how does the case stand? Mr. Howe, knowing all the circumstances of the case, knowing why a *mixed* council had been summoned, why a certain

promise was demanded,—in fact, knowing all about it,—is represented by his clerical friends as having made a promise which *misled* the promisees, and left him an outlet by which to escape from the fulfilment of that promise! Could the voice of the dead be heard, it would be to exclaim, “Save me from my friends!” One monument has been erected to his memory in the graveyard at Pepperell, over which, no doubt, affection has shed many tears. And now his clerical brethren have tried to erect another, with types and ink, to his deep disgrace.

The next witness is the Rev. Mr. Bennett, of Woburn. He recollects nothing about the matter. Of course his testimony is unimportant. The Rev. Humphrey Moore says as follows:—“*It is my opinion, based on what recollection I have, that he [Mr. Howe] expressed willingness to exchange with ministers in that region, whose characters were good, and who were in regular standing.*” Very well, there we have it *again*; the promise was made, a promise wider and more liberal than we ever supposed was asked for. It is proved by Mr. Moore himself. But the witness goes on,—“*By this I did not understand that he promised to exchange with Unitarians.*” No matter what Mr. Moore “understands”; we want the facts, and we can probably understand them as well as he. As this witness is somewhat notorious in these parts for his *wit*, perhaps this wholesale excommunication of Unitarians is only a specimen of that gift. The Note ends thus:—“The testimony of four credible witnesses must be true, and therefore this illiberal complaint is seen to be groundless.” Indeed! who sees it? Of those “four” witnesses, one testifies nothing at all; *and the other three all testify that the promise WAS MADE.* Their own constructions of the promise are entirely gratuitous, and nothing to the point.

This testimony of four ministers was designed to meet and rebut the testimony of the Rev. Drs. Ripley and Thayer, and the Rev. Messrs. Damon and Bascom,—men who died full of years and of honors. The reader is referred to this Address for their plain, precise, and circumstantial statement of facts, as they occurred in the ordaining council.

NOTE D.

NOTE J of the “Centennial Discourse” says, that “Luther’s great doctrine of the Reformation” was “acknowledging him [Christ] as our alone Saviour.” Indeed, that is a new discovery! We had supposed that the whole Christian church from the beginning had embraced that doctrine. The Note goes on,—“Accordingly, we disclaim our own righteousness in point of justification, cleaving to him for righteousness, grace, life, and glory.” And then the writer adds,—“If this is not dis-

tinctive Orthodoxy, what is?" Really, this last is a *hard question*; and when Professors Stuart, Taylor, Tyler, and the Auburn and Princeton Professors shall have settled it, their decision shall be announced, with becoming solemnity, from the pulpit of the First Parish in Pepperell. But it is a great mistake to suppose that to disclaim one's own righteousness is peculiar to Orthodoxy; it is common to *every Christian denomination* of which we have any knowledge. It is to God's free mercy and grace that we must look for pardon and acceptance, and not to our own righteousness. To say that this was Martin Luther's "great doctrine of the Reformation" is an unscholarlike mistake; for it was the *abuse of this doctrine* by the Roman Catholic priesthood, that gave the first start to the reformatory movement. The Catholics said that the merits of Christ constituted a fund for the Church. Upon the basis of that fund, they began to sell indulgences. Tetzel brought the infamous merchandise into Luther's neighbourhood, and the sturdy Reformer began his war upon Popery itself. Perhaps it will not be impertinent to say, that the doctrine of the Reformation was, "the Bible is the only sufficient rule of faith and duty." This struck at the root of Papacy, inasmuch as it denied the supreme authority and infallibility of the Pope.

NOTE E.

NOTE K of the "Centennial Discourse" says that the church in Pepperell was formed from the Union Church in Groton; and that therefore this latter church was present by invitation at the "Centennial," on the 29th of January. The Union Church in Groton was formed November 21, 1826. It remains an unsettled question, how this blooming mother of twenty-one years can have a venerable daughter a hundred years of age.

